

# TORREY BOTANICAL CLUB REMINISCENCES

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If I remember correctly, it was in 1876 or 1877 that Doctor Britton and I joined the Torrey Botanical Club. We were classmates in the Columbia College School of Mines at the time and had collected plants together in a more or less desultory way. Each of us had a small local herbarium and we did the best we could to identify and name our specimens with the aid of Gray's Manual. The only instruction we received in botany was one lecture a week during one term, by Professor Newberry, who also lectured on zoölogy, paleontology and geology. Practically, he was professor of "natural history." There was no laboratory work of any kind and we were left entirely to our own devices so far as assistance in securing botanical information or knowledge was concerned.

We had heard vague rumors to the effect that somewhere in the recesses of the old college buildings an herbarium was housed, and after making several inquiries we finally located it, and found Mr. P. V. Leroy in charge as curator. I believe his salary was paid by Mr. John J. Crooke and not by Columbia. Certainly Columbia made no use of the herbarium. The Torrey Botanical Club met there and in this way we became acquainted with some of the members and soon ventured to apply for admission.

I shall never forget the first meeting I attended. I felt that I was under indictment for the crime of being a young man. There were no young botanists in those days. Many of those whose acquaintance I made at these early meetings were as old as I am now and others were older, and that was forty years ago. I recall particularly Alphonso Wood, William H. Leggett, P. V. Leroy, O. R. Willis, Bowers, Ruger, and several others. I never met Dr. Torrey, of course, as he died in 1873. No woman had yet been elected to membership in the Club. Any such innovation would

have been unthinkable at that time. We brought specimens to the meetings, discussed them, helped each other to identify them, described how, when and where they were collected, and then arranged informally for a field-meeting—perhaps for more than one—before the next meeting of the Club. If I remember correctly the dues were one or two dollars a year. Subscription to the *Bulletin* was a dollar. It was not published by the Club, but by Mr. Leggett personally. There were no expenses, except in connection with the small number of postal cards to announce the meetings. The money in the treasury was mostly spent for refreshments, and after each meeting we had a pleasant, sociable time, drinking coffee and eating cakes and sandwiches and occasionally fruit when in season.

Attending meetings in those days was not so easy as it is now—I mean for out-of-town members. I lived at Port Richmond on Staten Island. The last boat to the island was at 9 P. M. I used to take the midnight train on the Central Railroad of New Jersey at Liberty Street, get off at Bergen Point Station, walk three quarters of a mile to the shore of the Kill van Kull, wake up a man who lived in a little shanty there, and hire him to ferry me over to Staten Island in a rowboat, arriving home about 1:30 A. M. Sometimes, in winter, the trip was not a comfortable one; but I do not recall that I ever thought it a hardship, and, to the best of my recollection, I think I merely regarded it all as a matter of course.

I still live on Staten Island, but I can attend this meeting in the Bronx to-day far more easily and with less waste of time in coming and going than was formerly the case when I attended the meetings held at 49th Street.